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“Good English”: Literacy and Institutional Systems at a Community Literacy
Organization

By

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“GOOD ENGLISH”: LITERACY AND INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS AT A
COMMUNITY LITERACY ORGANIZATION

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University of Nebraska, 2010

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Abstract: This thesis explores the impact of institutions and the systems and communities of which they are a part on literacy instruction, practices, and rhetoric at a community literacy organization in Lincoln, Nebraska. A majority of students served by this organization are adult English Language Learners, many of whom receive instruction from volunteer tutors. In this unique context, a number of factors affect literacy learning, particularly the perpetuation of conservative, hegemonic discourses about literacy by the organizations which fund literacy education programming at this site. The power dynamics at work in these granting organizations and in larger systems that control and govern literacy (including its definition(s), practices, and instructional methods) influence the ways in which literacy is appropriated in the literacy organization's rhetoric. However, these dominant conceptions of literacy do not fully take into account the learning needs, style, and attitudes of the diverse, dynamic populations of adult English Language Learners in contemporary Lincoln. This thesis seeks to expose the gaps in current scholarship on adult basic education and English Language Learners that limit the potential for understanding adult ELLs learning in nonacademic contexts.

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Chapter 1

Literacy in Context: An Introduction to Lincoln Literacy Council

In this piece, I seek to offer a framework for conceiving of the institutionalized systems that rub up against complex social and cultural dynamics shaping the work of tutors, learners, and staff at a community literacy organization. Institutions and the systems of which they are part construct representations of literacy in the service of the dominant culture, sometimes indicating a limited ability to account for student realities. Already, practitioners and scholars have recognized the importance of centering language and literacy education with adult ELLs in terms of focusing on their unique needs. A disciplinary gap between literacy studies and adult basic education has left the implications of this context of adult ELLs in community-based non-profit literacy education unexplored. To do so requires a fuller illustration of relationships within and between institutions and communities, and the ways in which these are shaped by social, cultural and economic forces. This is a context in which literacy, adult basic education, and adult ELL education coexist under the institutional umbrella of literacy. In this context, I explore the implications of the web of institutional pressures, obligations, assumptions and relationships that come to bear on LLC and work done by tutors and learners in local contexts.

Lincoln Literacy Council sits on the corner of 9th and G Streets in Lincoln, Nebraska, housed in a compact rectangle that once housed European foods store owned by German immigrants. This organization serves the ever-growing and diverse populations of immigrants and refugees in Lincoln. From the street, drivers can see a colorful mural by artist (and former LLC student) Faridun Zoda, called “The Lamp of

Literacy.” On the other side flies a banner that beckons passers-by to “Teach English! 476-READ.” Inside, small shared offices and a classroom/meeting room frame the narrow hallway. In the tiny library, shelves sag slightly from the weight of all the books. Orchestrated from this central space, ten part-time staff, a full-time executive director, three AmeriCorps members, two part-time drivers, a small staff of child care providers, and over 150 volunteers work in language and educational programs throughout the community. Classes are held at public schools, libraries, churches, ethnic centers, and other community sites. Programming varies from weekly tutoring sessions between one volunteer and one student, to drop-in conversation groups, to more structured classes for “workforce readiness” or U.S. citizenship test preparation. Lincoln Literacy Council was established in the 1970’s for adult native English speakers in need of reading and writing instruction. While the organization still serves these individuals, my focus will be on the much larger – and relatively newer – populations of adult English Language Learners who seek out LLC.

Currently, adult ELLS make up 93% of students at Lincoln Literacy Council. In Lancaster County, immigrants and refugees are the fastest-growing populationⁱ and also Nebraska’s fastest-growing subgroup in adult basic education.ⁱⁱ According to the Nebraska Adult Education State Plan, the number of “limited English speaking adults” enrolled in adult literacy education classes increased 186.5% from 1990-1998, from just over 10.2% of adult students to over 31.6 percent. However, even this percentage is misleadingly low, due to being somewhat out of date (but the most recent available), and since the definition of these learners account for primarily *speaking* ability, not reading and writing or overall communication skills. Overall, Lincoln itself is home to a much

more diverse population than outsiders might imagine. Since being designated a federal refugee resettlement location, Lincoln has resettled over 5500 refugees; currently, half of the state's refugees (over 2,000) live in Lincoln.ⁱⁱⁱ Thousands of voluntary immigrants^{iv} from over 60 countries also reside in Lincoln. According to Mary Pipher's *The Middle of Everywhere*, Lincoln's "non-white" population has grown 128% from 1990 to 2002. The background of these individuals is incredibly diverse, being shaped by religion, gender, education, class, ethnic or racial identity, in ways that combine to affect their language learning experiences. Many of them have also experienced political, social, and economic forces in their home country that restricted their literacy learning. Others have advanced degrees from abroad that are not recognized in the United States. This influx of diverse individuals from a variety of social, cultural, and education backgrounds illustrates that, in only a couple of decades, the population of Lincoln and its literacy needs have shifted significantly.

But, first, what is literacy? More importantly, who says? And in reference to whom? A group of experts was assembled by ETS, through federal funding for the National Adult Literacy Survey in 2000 to revise old definitions that relied on somewhat arbitrary indicators of literacy (such as the ability to score at a certain level on a standardized exam). They decided on the following: practicing literacy is "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (2000). However, scholars of the New Literacy Studies recognize that such definitions still fail to account for the fact that literacy is a "social, not a neutral construction [...] and its uses are always imbedded in relations of power and struggles over resources," according to Brian Street (*Cross-Cultural* 29). Literacy in

praxis cannot be separated from its ideological implications or particular context(s). This is why the question of ‘What is literacy?’ proves relevant for the students at Lincoln Literacy Council, regardless of whether their learning has to do with reading and writing.

As Linda Flower argues, literacy is not in fact singular, but “literacies, rather, are situated actions geared toward solving problems” (in Grabill, 30). At LLC, this is how literacies are situated and framed: as solutions to “problems,” such as unemployment, that individuals and communities may face. Flower’s work points toward recent trends in scholarship on adult literacy education that focus on community literacies and community-based literacy programs^v. Such programs highlight the local and contextualized nature of literacy. Still, only recently has scholarship begun to fully explore the diversity within community literacy programs. Even as scholars have moved toward a conception of literacy that is “defined by context to the extent that it is essentially meaningless in its abstract form” (Grabill 32), few scholars have accounted for the adult ELL students in community language learning programs with concomitant consideration of the meaning of the label “literacy.”

One might argue, however, that examining English instruction concerning immigrants and refugees is “already covered” by the large body of work on TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). To some extent this is true, but that focus remains largely on K-12 and higher education classrooms. Of course, some of this work does offer insight on language learning that is relevant to adult ELLs, but the varying contexts of community literacy programs overlap little with the traditional school setting. Student education, career, and life goals; funding; classroom environment;

training and experience of teachers; and other variables all are markedly different in community-based programs serving immigrant and refugee ELLs.

A few scholars in adult basic education, especially Elsa Auerbach^{vi}, have studied literacy and adult ELLs in the context of adult education. However, some TESOL scholars, such as Julie Mathews-Aydinli, argue that adult ELLs in nonacademic literacy learning programs are “erroneously placed” into the category of adult basic or adult literacy education. She is correct that this placement is problematic because this field tends to use models based more on the needs of NES adult learners. Nevertheless, this does not change the reality that many adult ELLs learn under the institutional banner of “literacy,” though gaps do exist between scholarship on literacy and adult ELL education. Most scholarship also fails to account for the other, less visible (than teachers or students) forces that shape the definition of literacy in this context, including foundations and grantors that fund LLC’s operations.

Since they are accountable to and reliant upon these funding institutions, the ways in which LLC appropriates literacy is influenced primarily by these larger, more powerful organizations. To some extent, this is a case in which “[l]iteracy is a term used by professionals, politicians, and pressure groups, and has not become part of the vocabulary of the citizens to whom it is applied,” in the words of John-Paul Hautecoeur in *Alpha 7: Basic Education and Institutional Environments*. Students tend not to use the word “literacy” to describe their learning. In the case of the immigrant and refugee ELLs at LLC, I would argue that this is not because of a limited vocabulary, but because “literacy,” as it is generally understood, simply does not fully encompass the learning goals and experience of students.

Nevertheless, if scholars take Mathews-Aydinli's suggestion not to place adult ELLs under the umbrella of adult basic education, the reality of institutional relationships and labels is ignored. Jeffrey Grabill reminds us that institutions (not necessarily scholars, teachers, or students) define literacy in institutional contexts, especially in community-based, grassroots programs where many institutions (compete to) define literacy simultaneously. LLC's definition of literacy is impacted by grant funders; local, state, and federal legislation; tutors, learners, staff, and board members. Therefore, we cannot look at current research on adult ELLs as simply misplaced into the "wrong" category (even if a separate category may ultimately be needed). Rather, we must examine how the idea of literacy is appropriated in the contexts where students learn and the implications of continuing to overlook the ways in which complex webs of institutional relationships come to bear on context. In order to appeal to funding organizations and potential sponsors, LLC tends to employ dominant but simplistic conceptions of literacy (such as the power of books and literacy's impact on the community) that do not align with the reality of students' needs and desires in relation to literacy. All instruction here takes place under the guise of literacy, but is much more complex than this one word implies to those of us that have been schooled in the dominant school- and book-based conceptions of literacy.

Research Roles, Methodology, and Aims

As much as possible, I seek to examine LLC through the students' own words and literacy practices, as informed by their cultural background and lived experience. However, this aim was complicated by my role in this space as both participant (teacher,

tutor, coordinator and/or administrator) and observer/researcher. I worked for one year at LLC as an AmeriCorps member, about twenty hours per week. While I was paid a stipend by a grant awarded to the City of Lincoln, LLC pays \$2000 per year to host AmeriCorps members. After my year of service was up, I became a contract employee working only about 6 hours per week. Therefore, many of my initial observations were made during the first year, while official research has taken place since my hours were reduced.

Though I have become acquainted and comfortable with a number of students, I found that many still are reluctant to talk openly about their learning experience or to offer anything but glowing praise for teachers and classes, especially given the attitude in many cultures in of respect toward anyone in a teaching role. Mary Pipher notes that when she was writing *The Middle of Everywhere*, she “came to the conclusion that a formal question-and-answer format is too similar to an interrogation. People are fearful they will say the wrong thing” (14). After interviewing one student, even though I thought our comfort level was enough to put us at ease, I agreed with Pipher. Therefore, I rely on observations written down after tutoring sessions with one student, twice weekly for a 6 month period^{vii}. This student’s general observations about his learning experiences – which have included working with several different tutors and several group classes – have offered me a great deal of insight into the effects of institutional forces on student learning and their thoughts toward literacy. However, I recognize the need not to generalize too widely from such a small sample of students. In addition, I interviewed several staff members, who in most cases have also volunteered as tutors, and currently serve primarily in administrative or teaching positions (in such a small

organization, these often overlap). I also spoke with an experienced volunteer about her perceptions and experiences.

While I recognize the problematic nature of my reliance on the voices of those in power, of the program administrators more often than the students, I found in the course of my research that this was the best way to gain insight on the institutional structures and hierarchies that inform LLC's constructions of literacy. Those who gave their time and insight in interviews have my gratitude and at no point do I intend to disparage any of the work done by my dedicated co-workers. Rather, any criticism I mean to convey is rooted in the larger ideological and entrenched structures of power and authority, in which Lincoln Literacy Council's continued existence is contingent on the financial support of more powerful institutions, operating under largely conservative hegemonic discourses about literacy. Furthermore, my limited perspective underscores the need for further research with adult ELLs and continuous refining of research practices in ways that allow for flexibility based on local contexts.

Chapter 2: Current Scholarship

While the amount of research on programs like LLC's remains somewhat small, important work has already been done. Much of this work advocates for adult ELL literacy programs in general, while addressing the need for further study in particular directions, such as methodology and research standards.^{viii} Other areas of inquiry involve the experiences of particular ethnic or cultural groups and their motivations for literacy and language learning.^{ix} Some explore the dynamics of gender, age, and socioeconomic status in student learning and in instructors' pedagogical strategies.^x

These are all valuable contributions to a field that has become a site of serious examination only relatively recently. For the sake of maintaining my focus, I must overlook many of them here because they are quite specific in their subject matter, so that it may not be appropriate to use them to attempt to generalize about institutional forces. Furthermore, only a few examine primarily community-based sites of adult ESL instruction with volunteers, or mention literacy per se. Such works that include in-depth ethnographic observation about a particular group also highlight where my project is lacking: in this space, I cannot fully account for all the diversity among the adult ELL population served by LLC. The work of these scholars point to the need to keep in mind the differences among learners and their home cultures, and that any sub-group of learners warrants study in their own right. My goal, therefore, is to show the forces that affect all of these learners in some (though not necessarily an identical) form.

Julie Mathews-Aydinli sums up the state of current scholarship in her survey of research on adult immigrants, refugees, and migrant workers studying English in non-academic contexts in her 2008 article, “Overlooked and Understudied? A Survey of Current Trends in Research on Adult English Language Learners.” In this piece, she explores work in “privately sponsored programs, volunteer literacy services, community-based programs, [and] workplace ESL classes” (198), highlighting differences between the needs and expectations of adult ELL students in these programs and other adult learners and ELL students. For instance, the more extensive research concerning young ELL students in public schools may not be able to account for the deeply entrenched cultural assumptions and identity that an adult learner possesses. Political and community interest in programs for adult learners has increased in recent years, she

notes, often focusing on the perceived economic and social costs of limited English skills that limit full participation in the workplace or the wider community. In spite of the general acknowledgement of this need, the glaring issues with such programs, including relatively high dropout rates, inconsistent attendance levels, and external factors affecting learning, have not been fully examined.

Furthermore, she points to an issue that became immediately clear to me when beginning this research, that these works come from a variety of different fields and publication sources, using various methodologies and theoretical frameworks. While these different approaches all have something useful to offer to each conversation and to one another, Mathews-Aydinli worries about the fact that scholarship on the adult ELL population lacks a sense of “shared theoretical understandings.” This makes drawing general conclusions about learners and articulating portable pedagogical strategies difficult. It also provides greater challenges for less established scholars (like me) attempting to navigate the conversations. In addition, Mathews-Aydinli finds the nature of much of the work problematic in that it is “generally observational” or anecdotal^{xi} and in some cases uses “unreliable or unclear” methods. There are, however, a number of variables at work in the learning and research context that might help explain why this is so, a subject I return to this later in this study.

Studies cited in this article generally fall under one of the following three categories: ethnographic, teacher-related, and second-language acquisition (SLA). The ethnographic work is of the greatest use to my own project, as it more fully takes into account the social, cultural and institutional aspects of learning which are so important to understanding literac(ies). Many of the SLA articles seem targeted more toward an

audience of linguists who demonstrate extensive knowledge about the methodologies and jargon of this professional sector. However, I am not sure that work done in that particular form readily offers insight for literacy scholars more generally or for most adult ELL tutors, who are more often laypeople: educated, but with limited teaching and language experience. Though it is important work regarding how students learn and tutors teach, for my purposes I must look at the diverse factors and issues affecting adult English Language Learners before attempting an understanding of how to apply SLA findings in tutoring or teaching situations. Mathews-Aydinli identifies most of the ethnographic studies as concerning questions of “identity, power, and socialization” (201). Some focus on certain ethnic communities, others on aspects of language and learning, and also some which “simply describe” adult ELL programs. My work attempts to not only describe the institution, but to analyze the structures therein and their relationship to language learning under the institutional umbrella of “literacy” learning and practice. She examines studies which investigate learner and tutor motivations (Bernat 2004; Warhol 2004; Hubenthal 2004). For my project, this information helps me understand and generalize about learners more easily, but I must also resist the temptation to generalize too hastily and widely and forget the diversity among adult ELL learners.

Also included are studies about issues of learner identity and community, especially as affected by student and tutor attitudes toward literacy in English (Jeon 2005; Gordon 2004; Skilton-Sylvester; Warriner 2003; Palacios 2002). From these Mathews-Aydinli identifies important trends that emerge and are essential for my own perspective. Most of the studies collectively underscore the diversity among adult ELLs. Such varying factors may include age, educational background, professional background, and

ethnicity. I would add that gender and immigration status (i.e. refugee, legal or illegal immigrant, naturalized citizen) must also be considered as factors affecting learners (and tutors') diverse expectations and needs. These studies also highlight the complex cultural factors at work for adults who may feel pressure to learn English speaking or literacy skills, and yet worry about the risk of losing native cultural and language knowledge, especially as they watch a new generation of their children adopt English to an increasing extent as the preferred or only language inside and outside the home. Diversity in adult ELL populations also must be taken into account when evaluating student learning due to the fact that different reasons for learning English necessitate different markers of success.

Mathews-Aydinli offers a number of conclusions, including the call for more research and questions of importance for future studies. She notes how limited the use of studies on ELL in higher education and on adult basic literacy are for studying adult ELLS in nonacademic contexts. The questions she raises lead me to consider a number of questions about my own projects. For instance, why is there little difference in the training for volunteer tutors that will work with BASIC or ELL students? Why do programs like LLC still largely rely on the instructional model (one-with-one tutoring) conceived for native English speaking adult literacy learners when teaching adult ELLs? She also calls for research to "prioritize quantitative, experimental data collection and analysis," because this is essentially mandated by the policy makers who are most willing to consider research of that nature. This brings up the question of the audience for such scholarship; Mathews-Aydinli assumes that scholarship in this area will have the most impact if it can be used to influence policy or funding decisions. However, the field also

needs work that can help program staff and volunteer tutors find insight into their work and strengthen their teaching methods. She also needs to take into account why more standardized methodological and quantitative approaches are problematic or difficult to implement in such contexts. This can help researchers engaged in future work to design their work around such challenges.

One of the earliest pieces to address adult ELLs in volunteer-based programs was Schlusberg and Muller's piece, written for the Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education (1995), partly to address the findings of a 1995 "national evaluation" on ESL instruction in adult education. They provide a useful but brief overview of the structures, programming, challenges and benefits that characterize these organizations, along with the demand for such programs and why learners may be drawn to them: "because there is no other program to meet their needs – that is, there is no ESL program that offers instruction at their level of proficiency, at a location they can get to, or on a schedule they can meet" (5), or at a price they can afford. Schlusberg and Muller suggest the reason why ELL students are "lumped" in the adult basic education category, because of a mismatch between demand and available programming; thus, they are accommodated by existing organizations. Upon reading this article, the far-reaching prevalence of the general structure of volunteer-based instruction seemed surprising, particularly when considering that (superficially, at least) little has changed in the foundation of these programs during the span of 15 years. While it provides a useful framework showing the numerous commonalities among organizations like LLC nationwide, in its brevity it does not offer much analysis or critique, but rather a report on national trends in an emerging field.

A more localized account is offered by Yiqiang Wu and Katharine Carter in “Volunteer Voices: A Model for the Professional Development of Volunteer Teachers,” though they aim for more generalized conclusions for other volunteer based adult ELL programs. They focus their work at The Adult ESL Program at the YWCA in Princeton. The institutional situation mirrors LLC’s in many ways; they explain how “community based programs struggle to provide needed services with shrinking funds and as demand for instruction often outstrips supply, the role of volunteers in teaching Adult ESL may be expanding^{xiii}” (16). As Wu and Carter characterize the nature of their program, they make the important, but certainly often neglected, move of attempting to define both the words “volunteer” and “tutor.” Pointing to the problematic nomenclature of “tutor” (as opposed to “teacher”), they define a “tutor” as “more often than not, simply a teacher without institutional connection, who instructs or assists students in preparing for exams, especially privately” (17). They continue to use that term throughout most of the article, but their approaches recognize the limitations inherent in that description of the work a tutor does. Wu and Carter de-emphasize the private nature of the instruction. While volunteers are often, especially initially, matched one-with-one with a student, they also are used “in conjunction with the regular ESL classroom as well as small-group instruction, cultural workshops and individualized sessions targeting grammar, pronunciation, and survival skills” (17). Volunteer teachers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with and become a part of the culture of the YWCA’s learning environment. The teacher’s institutional connection is cultivated, not ignored (as the above definition of “tutor” might imply). Doing so “help[s] build competence and commitment to their learning experience” (17).

Wu and Carter's emphasis on (continued) learning of the volunteer tutors in noteworthy. They note that most other programs and studies focus on the formal processes of tutor training before (and sometimes during) the course of a volunteer tutor's experience. Wu and Carter, however, recognize that the learning process continues for tutors in a number of dimensions, which include learning about pedagogy, the YWCA program, student learning experiences, cultures, and community. Certainly, these tutors do much more than help students prepare for testing, if they help students prepare for this at all. A tutor helps a student prepare for an exam so that the student will be able to perform well on the test and receive higher marks. However, those who tutor adult ELL learners in programs like the YWCA are to "instruct or assist" students in English as it relates to functioning in everyday life, at work, or to prepare for future education.

The bulk of the article discusses the results of a study concerning volunteer teachers' perceptions of their roles in ELL instruction. This includes volunteer recruitment, training, inclusion, maintenance (the length of time spent as a volunteer and motivation for continuing), and inclusion ("making the volunteers feel part of the ESL community" [18]). They are to be commended for such a large scale undertaking^{xiii}. The subsequent findings are valuable and offer insight on volunteer programs that function successfully. For instance, it provides an illustration of tutor demographics, including their personal backgrounds, motivations, teaching experience, and education. Most volunteers in their context are highly educated, well-travelled, older women. They also note that volunteers serve the organization solely in a teaching capacity. While this may seem obvious, it points to a trend in such programs, including at LLC. Volunteers are engaged in teaching work, while other responsibilities within the organization, such as

administration and fundraising, are delegated to staff or committees made up of board members. Though the YWCA's program seeks to cultivate awareness of and engagement in all aspects of the program on some level, this division of labor this could lead to a disconnect between the views and needs of volunteers as opposed to others in the organization.

Another focus of the article is ongoing training and professionalization of volunteers. They note that most volunteers in their program do not receive a lot of training, with less than half participating in training before beginning tutoring, and just more than half attending training after. Volunteer tutors are encouraged to attend regular workshops throughout the year, but Wu and Carter report that only a quarter of tutors find these to be "effective" training tools. Nevertheless, they note that many tutors are dedicated to tutoring long-term and many become teaching staff in the program. At LLC, as well, several current or former volunteers have taken on staff, AmeriCorps, and board positions.

Wu and Carter offer insight into a well-functioning volunteer tutor program, but the relatively short article does not do much to take students into account. How, for instance, do students perceive tutors, and how do students contribute to the success of the program? At times the piece is somewhat self-congratulatory and serves more of a public relations function than one of rigorous scholarly inquiry and reflection. One might also be cautious of implementing these "best practices" uncritically without examining the needs of a particular organization or classroom. Nevertheless, Wu and Carter's efforts to reach out to tutors and publish the study is an important step for more scholarship on programs in which volunteers are the primary teachers.

Another piece that examines the role of the volunteer tutor is Alisa Belzer's "What are they doing in there? Case studies of volunteer tutors and adult literacy learners" (*Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, April 2006). The question in her title is an important one with complex implications. Belzer notes that "the stakes are high" for adult literacy learners, and thus it is essential for professionals and researchers to understand the instructional contexts and help cultivate a context most conducive to learning. Belzer traces back the emergence of the volunteer tutor to the 60's, when federal funding was first legislated for adult basic education. Presently, most instruction in literacy councils and community-based programs is provided by volunteers. The number of volunteer tutors in programs that are funded primarily by the federal government is somewhat less, but still significant, as they make up nearly half of instructors in such programs. Belzer engages in the important work of examining the relationships between the contexts of literacy programs and the work that happens in one-with-one tutoring sessions. She asks, what do they do in tutoring sessions? What forces influence their work, and how does that influence manifest itself? In three case studies, she records the audio from tutoring sessions, performs analysis, and follows up with separate student and tutor interviews.

For my purposes, the most important part of her work is on volunteer training and the dynamics of the relationship between tutor and student. She examines the influence of training on tutoring strategies. However, she finds that in some cases, tutoring sessions may not incorporate anything from the training at all. Furthermore, a disconnect also appears in the ways in which students and tutors talk about their sessions and one another, when compared to what actually happens in a tutoring session. For instance, one

student declares that “everything” their tutor does is helpful, while Belzer’s analysis of audio indicates how ineffective strategies were repeatedly employed by the tutor. This example highlights the challenges of studying these contexts and especially of evaluating the quality (or results) of instruction. In such a “learner-centered” context, is there ever a case in which the learner may not in fact know what is best for their learning? How do we evaluate the strategies used by a tutor who is not experienced in reading instruction and draws little upon her minimal training?

Her case study analysis is careful and insightful; however, it involves only native English speakers teaching native speakers reading and writing skills. With a limited range of activities occurring in such tutoring sessions, a consistent theoretical framework and a limited set of available data is provided by the context. In the case of programs such as LLC that are more likely to serve English Language Learners, it is more difficult to consistently compare and analyze the wide range of activities that may occur in tutoring. Wu and Carter note, for example, that tutoring ELL students may “take many forms: conversational practice, filling out forms, homework help, whatever works best and suits the needs of the student” (19). Belzer’s analysis of the use of particular reading strategies, for instance, therefore may not translate well into a strategy for examining ELL tutoring sessions, but it offers a starting point for thinking of how to examine and interpret them. Furthermore, the dynamics of an ELL tutoring situation are likely to be more complex, complicated by a wide range of cultural assumptions about teachers and gender, class, race, religion, ethnicity, and other variables that may not be as evident in audio recordings. Not that none of these factor into literacy tutoring sessions between

native English speakers, but in the context of LLC, tutors and students almost certainly share fewer cultural assumptions.

In her article, “Competent performances of situated identities: Adult learners of English accessing engaged participation,” Warriner employs the theoretical lens of communities of practices and situated learning. One thing that Warriner does here that is exceptional – and done exceptionally well – is to integrate understandings about and approaches to adult literacy with broader pedagogical frameworks and the learning contexts of adult ELLs. She explores the complex relationship between “power, access and transparency” in allowing participant access to a particular community of practice. This analysis “raises questions about the limits and possibilities of a teaching curriculum that values ‘real world’ experiences and situated learning in theory but does not prioritize them in practice (22)”. For nonacademic educational contexts like LLC that focus on these “survival English” skills, there may be a great deal of emphasis on learning things students can use in the “real world.” However, as Warriner suggests, there is limited examination about what constitutes this “real world” and how it is experienced. This makes Warriner’s focus on communities of practice useful, because these communities are “defined simultaneously by its members and by the practice in which that membership engages” (23). In other words, she focuses on not only who members are, but what they do (or do not or cannot) and how they do it.

Warriner also emphasizes the difference between a teaching curriculum and a learning curriculum, as conceived of in Lave and Wenger’s work on CoP’s. She notes that a teaching curriculum may attempt to take into account learners’ “real-world” needs and reality, but at the same time, the learners are likely themselves to automatically value

the goals of this curriculum, which stresses finding (entry-level) employment as soon as possible and becoming self-sufficient. Rooted in this are complex cultural notions about the authority of teachers; students may not be likely to view themselves as legitimate sources as knowledge. To address this tension, Warriner suggests that ways that “practitioners might re-envision and re-work their “teaching curriculum” in ways that align with the goals and priorities of their learners” (22). She begins this work by examining the complex dynamics between learner access to and participation in communities of practice, both in the classroom and the workplace.

Though she discusses literacy per se very little, she complicates the uncritical view of language as a set of skills transmitted from teacher to student. Drawing from the work of linguistic anthropologists, she notes how “a learner must also understand and be able to demonstrate their understanding of the pragmatic and social functions of language” (24), as they are confronted by various discourses. This may not always be apparent, much less transparent, in nonacademic instruction of adult ELLs by volunteers.

Warriner stresses the importance of viewing learners as “members of social and historical collectivities, and not as isolated individuals” (24). This is essential for researchers and ELL volunteers or instructors to keep in mind: that individual identities are always colored somehow by group memberships that are situated in particular social and historical realities. Literacy researchers, too, have long noted how a view of literacy as an autonomous, individual skill or achievement is problematic.^{xiv} In the context of Warriner’s program, group dynamics are somewhat different than LLC because instruction is somewhat more intensive, taking place in group classrooms from 7:30 – 3:30 PM. This begs the question, when looking at LLC, what is missing from a program

that isolates individuals in the one-with-one context and allows for limited engagement in a/the community in a learning context? Warriner notes that while “real-world” learning was valued in theory, there were few “legitimate learning opportunities” that allowed learners to practice participating in these communities. For immigrant and refugees, in particular, participation in new communities of practice depends on much more than the ability to communicate in English. In fact, the notion of “the ability to communicate in English” because almost infinitely complicated when we consider all the contexts and variables at work in the so-called “real world.”

Another study that examines the implications of empowering students and getting in touch with student needs through participatory practices in literacy education. Pat Campbell’s “Participatory Literacy Practices: Exploring Pedagogy” examines three different literacy programs in Canada, including one-to-one and group programs^{xv}, with both native-speaking adult basic literacy students and English Language Learners. Her work is useful for the way that it problematizes the simple and often repeated mantra that literacy program administrators and tutors must resist the urge to occupy an authoritarian position as teacher to address student needs and remain “student-centered.”^{xvi} Drawing on feminist, Freireian, Marxist, and socialist theoretical approaches to pedagogy, she examines basic pedagogical assumptions at work in literacy learning, especially with volunteer tutors. The pedagogical strategies examined are described as: “*to be* versus *to do*”; “top-up versus bottom-down”; and leadership. The first two, in particular, are useful to consider in my project as I think of tutor training approaches and student-tutor dynamics.

One important observation is the challenge of employing a “bottom-up” approach that views students as “active subjects of their learning” (60). In theory, of course, this approach has the best intentions. However, the tutors Campbell interviews express how this bottom-up approach is a jarring reversal of the school experiences of many students, especially immigrants and refugees (among those who have had formal schooling), in which they are passive recipients of the tutors expertise. I would add that students who have not been socialized in formal learning environments would be even more bewildered by the bottom-up approach. These students may have almost no idea how they are expected to act in a school situation, and may both desire and require more structure and planning. Campbell also makes the essential observation that the bottom-down approach may be chosen already by the tutor for the student, making it actually a top-down decision. In other cases, she notes that tutors verbally espoused a “bottom-up” approach but their tutoring sessions employed a more directive approach. It is difficult to find in practice a strictly bottom-up or top-down approach. Certainly, however, a tutor can balance these two ideas by listening to students carefully and help them articulate their needs and desires, while still making available one’s expertise (or other resources) as a tutor. To avoid employing a top-down approach, tutors must at the very least keep Street’s mandate to treat students’ “home” identities and backgrounds into consideration as we try to understand “the stance that learners take with respect to the ‘new’ literacy practices of the educational setting” (7, *Educational Contexts*).

Campbell also examines the subtle but essential difference between tutor and student conceptions of being and doing in teaching and learning. Some tutors explained that they were very task-oriented, focusing on what to *do*, and what students would do, in

each session. Campbell notes that this is probably to some extent a result of the “*structure of literacy programs in which they are positioned*” (my emphasis 58). This is key to my own analyses: the tension between individual pedagogical choices and the assumptions of the program. (you only have one hour a week – what are you going to *do* with/in that time? The passive construction of her sentence also asks us to consider: how are they positioned, and how do they (attempt to) position themselves?) Campbell also asks tutors to consider *how* the class will *be*. In student interviews, they often express the importance of engaging in both doing and being. The importance of being and learning how to be with others is an essential part of their learning, both linguistic and social.

Language always has a social function that takes many dynamic factors in account and is also a way in which identities are asserted, created, and/or performed (as in Warriner’s examination of the relationship between situated learning and situated identities). Campbell notes how tutors seem to demonstrate subservience to “[American] society’s dominant discourse that values doing over being (59). Though scholars like Gee (1991; 1996) have acknowledged the power of discourse to shape our ideas about literacy and identity, the power of such discourses is not always examined in work on English Language Learners. I believe it is especially important to consider when looking at volunteer tutors, who, in the absence of extensive training or experience with theories of language, pedagogy, and literacy learning may occur in ways that show a lack of awareness of the power of these dominant discourses. This piece also highlights Campbell’s own experience in which she was once “so obsessed with assessment, methodology, and remediation that [she] ignored gender, race and class”, as a result of programming that trains volunteers to “focus their attention on the individualized learner

and her or his reading deficiencies rather than on social structures and practices” (63).

She is speaking here more of one-on-one programs serving native speakers, but the main idea is the same: a warning against a decontextualized view of literacy.

To obtain an understanding of how institutional forces work in adult literacy education, I turn to Jeffrey Grabill’s *Community Literacy Programs and the Politics of Change* (2001). Grabill’s study examines primarily adult basic literacy education with native English speakers. His driving arguments, however, are key to framing an understanding of the context of LLC. His examination of the Western District Adult Basic Education showcases its function as an “institutional arrangement established in a community context for dealing with literacy needs” (xiv), just like LLC. Literacy’s meaning and value proceeds from the institution sponsoring it, he argues. Therefore, literacy is a product of the relationships, structures, and dynamics of this particular context, not an abstract thing. He highlights the ideological nature of literacy and the imperative of taking into account, even carefully tracing, power relations. Like LLC, Western District works closely with other community organizations, providing various services in a number of different sites. When attempting to define literacy in this context, Grabill moves between the symbolic conceptualizations of literacy, which are familiar to the public imagination, and the specific construction of literacy in the particular site. He analyzes four approaches to literacy: “theoretical, historical, educational, and community” (18), and the important themes that he finds some of these approaches to have in common: “mind, (social) culture, autonomy, and context” (20). Approaches concerned with the mind “locate the meaning and value of literacy internal to human beings” (20), while considering culture and contexts focus emphasizes the visible,

external aspects of literacy and learning. An autonomous approach, often combined with a focus on the internal, mind-related aspects of literacy, focuses on the individual.

Grabill notes that these two frameworks, with their cognitive, decontextualized assumptions, do not lend themselves to a study of community literacy organizations, as such organizations are defined largely by their context. Therefore, I take a cue from him in my focus. This is also why I depart from much of the SLA and TESOL literature, much of which revolves around a cognitive approach (which makes sense considering that many examine similar contexts).

Grabill also considers questions of power, decision-making, and access in community literacy institutions, anticipating his recommendations for change in literacy programs that desire to be truly “participatory.” These ideas will be important to my analysis of institutional dynamics that inform LLC. Chapter 5 discusses Community and Community Literacies, making the essential observation that, for all the work on community literacies, “the concept of community has not been subjected to much critical scrutiny” (87). Here he explores the relationships between the community – in both the abstract rhetorical sense and the concrete – and institutions. He argues that to change literacy programs and conceptions of literacy, we must re-evaluate the present intersections between communities and institutions.

Chapter 3: What is Literacy at LLC?

After framing a discussion of current scholarship with scholarly definitions of literacy, now I must take a cue from Grabill and examine the more complex, localized conceptions of literacy at work at Lincoln Literacy Council. Institutions are what “give

literacies existence, meaning, and value” (7). In the case of LLC, this makes the definition extraordinarily complex and multifaceted, considering all the institutions that affect it. Given, LLC is not in itself a very hierarchical, vertically organized institution; however, like other community-based nonprofits, it depends on the cooperation of numerous institutions.

First of all, a number of literacy organizations similar to LLC exist across the country under the umbrella of ProLiteracy. This is the one national accreditation service for such organizations, listing over 150 affiliates in 32 states.^{xvii} It accredits LLC’s tutor training program, and tutors who complete the training get a certificate bearing ProLiteracy’s seal. Trainers, likewise, must first complete ProLiteracy’s training certification program. The relationship between ProLiteracy and LLC is not that of a franchise which must answer to the demands of the corporation, but rather a loose affiliation that places minimal obligation on either group to the other. Presumably this allows flexibility for each local program, and permits ProLiteracy to focus its energies on campaigning for literacy rather than overseeing smaller organizations. ProLiteracy’s website proclaims an uncritical view of literacy’s “power” in tidy bullet points:

We believe in the power of literacy to end poverty, injustice, discrimination, and violence.

We believe that literacy empowers adults to make a better life and world for themselves and their families.

We know that adults who read raise children who read and do better in school and life.

We know that literacy helps families, be healthier, support themselves through work, be better citizens, and create a more fair and just society.^{xviii}

Even the name of the organization implies a wholly positive view of literacy. It does not say exactly why or how they believe or know these things. However, espousal of these tenets is essential to the goals of the organization, which includes advocating for

increased literacy programming and funding to national and international governing bodies, according to their website. They also work with non-government agencies internationally using their “Literacy for Social Change” methodology to create programs that “combine native language literacy lessons with community projects related to the environment, economic self-sufficiency, education, health, family literacy, and peace/conflict resolution.” Their rhetoric, which emphasizes the transformative power of literacy to benefit society and individuals, underscores their need to appeal to policy makers who often share this ideal. Available public and private funding remains paltry, even as the need for adult literacy education among ELLs increases.

While organizations affiliated with ProLiteracy may differ in countless ways, they also tend to have a number of things in common, nationally and even internationally in Canada and Australia. They spring from similar models of tutoring, usually some form of those espoused by Frank Laubach, an Evangelical missionary who widely popularized the “Each One Teach One” approach to adult literacy education in the 1950’s and 60’s. Laubach Literacy International and Literacy Volunteers of America merged in 2002 to create ProLiteracy. One-with-one is by no means the only widely used approach, and many organizations offer both small group and one-with-one instruction; still, it remains popular (Belzer 2006). Schlussberg and Muller (1995) note that many volunteer-based adult literacy programs have similar settings, using local community sites for instructions and sometimes partnering closely with these other organizations.

However, even a view of literacy that may help convince policymakers of the need for increased or sustained funding does not always take into account student understandings of literacy. The conception of literacy that exists in the popular

imagination relies on tropes of literacy that convey its meaning in a largely symbolic, not concrete, form(s). For an extensive web of institutions and community organizations to cooperate, however, literacy seems, necessarily, to have become a term of convenience that carries common currency. These institutions are the ones who collectively define literacy, but power is distributed unequally among the institutions and of course within them. Grabill points out that institutions are “a local manifestation of more general social relations” (127), therefore mirroring socioeconomic stratification and unequal distribution of power in a community. Many individuals served by LLC have low sociopolitical and socioeconomic status. For instance, many are not citizens with the right to vote, and with few other points of access for civic involvement. More than half have household incomes of less than \$10,000, according to the 2008 annual report. They are permitted a minimal amount of power in the community (at least the larger community of Lincoln; in their own even more local community, the case may be different). Therefore, they are at the bottom of the institutional power structures. They do not choose the ways in which (their) literacy is symbolically appropriated by institutions.

Yet the rhetoric of LLC and many other literacy organizations does not take power into account; rather, literacy is associated with greater equality in general. LLC’s motto is “uniting the community through communication.” The Board of Director’s mission statement is: “to assist people of all cultures and strengthen our community by teaching English language and literacy skills.” Here they seem to take an approach to literacy that focuses on the sociocultural aspects and the local context of literacy. When I interviewed tutors Cynthia and Karen, they noted that teaching literacy to immigrants and

refugees often means teaching cultural literacy, such as “how to go to the mall and buy something”, to participate in the social and economic institutions and discourses of the community. Drawing from Hirsch (1987), Grabill characterizes such a view as emphasizing cultural literacy over mere functional skills; cultural literacy relies on a “theory of community held together by knowledge and communication” (26). This is the theory at work in LLC’s rhetoric. However, the problem with a theory of community is that it may rather break down in practice. I will return to the problematic term “community” below. Communities and institutions cannot be isolated, but rather they exist as part of larger, deeply entrenched systems. Thus each community and institution is characterized by complex social and economic power dynamics at work on a systemic level. Those in power are the ones defining and labeling literacy and the literacy practices of those “below” them.

This means that LLC actually possesses relatively little power in the web of institutions of which it is a part. Already I have mentioned one institution that bears on LLC’s institutional structure, ProLiteracy. I do not mean to imply that these institutions necessarily have a deterministic or one-directional relationship with one another. Rather, I would expand Deborah Brandt’s (1998) idea of sponsors of literacy to include institutions; like the individual literacy sponsors that Brandt examines, organizations also carry what she calls “ideological freight” that come to bear on literacy learning in some form. This underscores the idea that literacy^{xix} is not an object or a static thing that can be given or delivered in a “pure” form. Brandt calls sponsors “delivery systems for the economies of literacy” (167). While individual sponsors are important to consider at LLC as well, adding an institutional dimension allows us to see just how complex and

far-reaching these delivery systems actually are and what happens to literacy in the process. Sponsors, like institutions, necessarily have an interest in the literacy learning of the ones sponsored and learners likewise have some sort of obligation to the sponsor.

Chapter 4: Internal and External Institutional Relationships and Funding Sources

The web of institutions sponsoring, controlling, and partnering with LLC is vast and difficult to organize. On the community level, LLC partners with local ethnic centers, such as the Asian Community and Cultural Center and El Centro [the Hispanic center] and local churches and schools. The degree of the collaboration varies, depending on other institutional relationships and priorities. For example, the churches at which I have held classes tend to offer primarily space; sometimes this aligns with the particular mission of the church. A local Presbyterian church has a strong emphasis on offering outreach (including Sunday School classes) to African refugees, many of whom live in the same neighborhood as the church. Therefore, they have also been a location at which classes for refugee women (formerly restricted to African women) take place. Partnerships with the ethnic centers tend to be characterized by more direct collaboration and negotiation of shared goals, including joint grant applications.

Program funding comes from a variety of sources. Only 3% of funds come from student and program fees.^{xx} Students pay \$20 annually to be matched one-with-one to a tutor, while those who attend group classes or conversation groups do not pay any fees, except for books. Contributions from corporate or individual sponsors make up 10% of income. In addition, 2% comes from individual memberships; all tutors are required to become members at a cost of \$25 annually. The vast majority of funds come from

foundation grants, though this blanket term entails a diverse number of groups. Funds may come from national organizations like the Robert Woods Johnson Foundation, for health literacy programming, or statewide ones like the Nebraska Community Foundation.^{xxi} LLC applies for specific awards from these organizations for particular purposes, such as NCF's Wealhtspring grant, which does not mention literacy per se, but aims more generally to increase Nebraska women's self-sufficiency (two-thirds of Lincoln Literacy Council's students are female). Obtaining funds for general operating expenses is more difficult, while it is easier to obtain funds for highly specialized populations and programs that meet the foundation's objectives.

In 2008, about 28% of funds came from state and county government grants.^{xxii} Almost all of these funds are designated for programs serving refugees, especially women. As a result, classes serving refugee students are more likely than other classes to include transportation, childcare, and sometimes books and materials for students. These funds also provide scholarships for these students that cover the \$20 fee for one-with-one tutoring. Other general sources include an annual fundraising event, which nets 7% of LLC's annual income (but also entails a large initial expenditure). Most of LLC's expenses (65%) consist of payroll costs, even though efforts are made to keep these to a minimum. Most staff will teach in some capacity at some point, but they generally spend far more time coordinating volunteers, applying for grants, keeping records, filing reports, meeting with partners, recruiting students, and performing various other administrative functions.

In terms of the organization itself, Lincoln Literacy Council is run by a volunteer board of directors. Board members include retired teachers and nurses, local business

owners, ELL instructors from the University of Nebraska and Southeast Community College, and one student.^{xxiii} They serve on committees, such as the budget, fundraising, and bylaws committees. About half of them currently tutor or have tutored students one-with-one; two have taught in a group setting. In general, however, it is unlikely that most students are aware of the existence of this group. It was months before I ever saw one of the elusive board members, and nearly a year until I encountered the president of the board. The structure of the board is more hierarchical than the network of LLC staff, with its president, first and second vice presidents, secretary, and treasurer. They make nearly every operational and financial decision about the organization, and the executive director answers to them. Sometimes the board members represent particular institutional intersections. For instance, a board member who is also an associate professor of Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education at UNL helped establish a partnership between LLC and this department that provides family literacy volunteers. It is their connections throughout the community that generally are responsible for securing “in-kind” donations and sponsorships that are not contingent on grant funds. Most have provided significant financial contributions to LLC themselves (all donors are listed in the annual report).

While the board brings a number of essential resources and beneficial relationships to LLC, it also complicates the institutional context and the interests at work here. Its relative segregation from most student activities seems like an example of how power tends to make itself invisible in institutional contexts, as Grabill observes (46). Hal Beder discusses the challenges of this structure for community based organizations. It is nearly impossible to gather a majority of volunteer tutors together to engage in

critical reflection and decision-making, and thus “authority for decision making is vested in our board members” (80). As for paid staff, at LLC they do hold monthly meetings, but weekly coordinator meetings have now been replaced by weekly email reports from each staff member, in order to limit staff hours and stay within the budget. Board members have more time to engage in discussion as a group. However, staff and volunteers only occasionally cross paths with board members. Last year, I went with another AmeriCorps member who was also a tutor to the annual meeting and awards luncheon. We thought it would be packed with tutors sharing stories about their experience while laughing and eating pizza. Instead, there were two or three longtime tutors, and the rest of the room was filled with board members and staff. We thought we had been directed to the wrong place. As we awkwardly munched on pizza, she noted that we were the youngest people in a room full of suits and ties. There was little dialogue and plenty of speeches. It became evident that, while the board represents a group of individuals with various types of valuable experience and expertise, they represent primarily middle class, largely white experience and interests as well. This illustrates the fact that Grabill emphasizes throughout his examination: socioeconomic relationships and structures present in the community are reflected in and by institutions. Those of the lowest socioeconomic status have limited contact with those of “higher” status, and virtually no access to their decision-making processes. While the one student voice in this group is a valuable one – a vocal and charismatic woman who I have worked with in several classes – it may be worth noting that she has been a resident of the United States for over thirty years, is retired and a US citizen. Therefore, she may not be able to

voice concerns about many of the current struggles that students experience and the way that their needs are affected.

While the perspective of the board and its members is by no means homogenous or myopic, it remains limited; how much does the “community” that the board members know have in common with the community that students experience? Peggy Sissel notes that adult literacy “practitioners must understand the learners world and life experience, both as an individual and as a member of his or her cultural group or community” (98). There is no reason why this should not be equally true for the policy makers and decision makers who influence the learners’ context. Of course, socioeconomic realities complicate this ideal. For instance, the former holder of the second student slot on the board stepped down because she wanted to work more hours as a childcare provider for LLC. Her husband is a construction worker who could work very little over the winter months. This job was valuable for her as a mother of two small children because she could bring her children to work with her. She was also busy taking community college courses. Especially judging from the significant number of retirees on the board, I would suggest that they have fewer commitments than she does (and many students do). She represents the largest population served by LLC – two-third of students are women, most with children – but this is also a population with little spare time for activities such as serving on committees.

Still, it should be noted that the nature of programming is not largely at the board’s discretion, but more strongly tied to institutional partnerships and available resources at that time. Most programs do not have a required curriculum dictated from above. Institutional relationships, rather, strongly influences what a class will look like

and what students it will serve. For example, in a partnership with El Centro this past summer, we combined a family literacy element with a computer class taught by El Centro's staff. Families came at 6 for dinner together; then, adults went to computer classes while LLC facilitated literacy-related activities for the children. For the final 15 minutes, children would share what they had done with their parents or engage in an activity together. One activity involved having the children draw a picture of their family; when they showed it to their parents, they were supposed to talk about who the people in the picture were and what they were doing (in English). This collaboration was beneficial because it gave learners a comfortable environment where they could socialize with members of their own community and it involved the whole family. Parents did not have to worry about finding childcare. It also gave adults a chance to use the resources of El Centro – new laptop computers – which LLC does not have. LLC continues to have a strong relationship with this organization. When a planned partnership with local elementary schools for a family literacy program serving primarily Hispanic families fell through, El Centro offered to host the classes instead. This illustrates how responsibility for community literacy programs is distributed horizontally throughout the community.

Collaboration with the Asian Center has been taking place for several years. In the case of this collaboration, the Asian Center is more in tune with changing Asian populations than LLC, which allows LLC to address those needs more quickly. They also run a program that helps newly arrived refugees adjust to life in Lincoln, funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which in the last year or two Lincoln has seen an influx of Karen refugees from Burma and Thailand. Soon a program of twice-weekly English classes was set up to serve this population; the Asian Center was an ideal location

because it was already familiar to these individuals, who had limited transportation, and allowed them access to other resources. For instance, a local company held a mini job fair one afternoon after class at the center. Students had someone to help interpret and assist in filling out applications already available and many of them got jobs. The trade-off, however, is that this meant far fewer of them could come to classes in the early afternoon. This highlights the paradox between associating increased English communication and literacy skills with the goal of finding work. I will return this issue below. Regardless, the Asian Center provides space and resources in combination with the resources (English tutors) offered by LLC.

Partnerships with local schools can offer a convenient place for adults to take classes, and makes recruiting students for these classes easier (at least in theory). However, these partnerships are characterized by more complex negotiations and conflicts in priorities and approaches are more likely to emerge. For instance, after extensive talks, LLC was to offer a family literacy class at a local elementary school. Family literacy is a site of particular emphasis in current discourses on literacy. Hautecouer writes that it has been framed as a potential “solution to undereducation, poverty, unemployment, and criminality, restoring the educational role to the family” (23), and shifting responsibility from the schools that were seen as inefficient due to “bureaucratic rigidity and lack of resources.” Furthermore, he cites Thomas Sticht, who notes that family literacy is often seen as a particularly good investment because it is thought to bring a double return: ‘the double-duty dollar’ (24). However, this view does not take difference and learner needs into account. Family literacy programs are appealing to many learners for a number of reasons, one of which, however, is surely one

of the barriers to many students' ability to attend English classes: the need for childcare (making these almost "triple-duty" dollars). However, before this program was to begin, the school district received word that they were selected as recipients of a highly competitive \$600,000 award from Toyota Family Literacy Program, to fund programs at three elementary schools. This provided far more resources than Lincoln Literacy could offer, including more class time and funding for LPS to train its own staff for the program. Undoubtedly, LPS is fortunate to receive these funds and be able to offer these services; but it overlaps asymmetrically with other institutional interests. The previous year, LLC partnered with one LPS elementary school to offer a family literacy "pilot" program, presumably to test a program that LLC might run the following year. LLC received funding for childcare and transportation costs, and the class experienced consistent levels of attendance. However, this did not guarantee a continued partnership between the two institutions on the same terms. Both depend for their success on larger institutions with more disposable funds.

Emphasis on economic benefits of family literacy and corporate involvement in literacy movements underscores the fact that even "non-profits" must compete in a capitalist economic framework for funding. Furthermore, these organizations "demand that we meet certain objectives" (80) and demonstrate a certain type of results, Beder notes. The climate of these funding organizations is influenced by complex economic, political, and social forces, but most larger foundations in particular tend toward conservative ideals in general; this is dangerous when it comes to literacy education, which serves a dynamic and ever-changing population, in communities which are rarely identical from one decade to the next. In fact, the core ideas of this paper had their

genesis in my reading of Mary Sheridan-Rabideau's discussion of "The Economics of Activism," a chapter in her book, *Girls, Feminism, and Grassroots Literacies*. Granted, this may not initially seem to overlap with adult ELLs in community based contexts, but in fact, Peggy Sissel points out that many scholars have examined the aptness of feminist pedagogies for accounting for the highly social dimensions of community based adult literacy programs (98). As I read Sheridan-Rabideau, my disillusionment from what were once utopic fantasies about nonprofit organizations grew more complete. She examines how grant proposals "wrote" the organization ("GirlZone") itself, as the grant writer was forced to negotiate priorities and make compromises based on the objectives of more powerful (and usually more conservative) organizations, and implement programs accordingly. Furthermore, idealistic, activist goals were compromised when "in service of a business model that did not value this work" (135), work in which results were not easily quantified. She notes how many feminist organization of this era, in order to sustain viable programming and organizations, resorted to a sort of "entrepreneurial feminism," in which their goals were shaped, both rhetorically and concretely, to appeal to funding organizations. In a sense, non-profit organizations such as LLC must also take an entrepreneurial approach to seeking literacy funding, emphasizing the economic benefits of their programming and painting the organization as a good investment.

The business models of most organizations sponsoring literacy work also involve an emphasis on dominant but simplistic conceptions of literacy. Just like GirlZone had to be careful not to "challenge the dominant paradigm" (139) if they wanted any grant funds, so does LLC have to appeal to conservative ideas about literacy. Grabill draws on

scholars such as Graff (1988) and Flower (1994) who note how a “technocratic,” autonomous model of literacy became popular after the second World War. This accompanied trends in making education more scientific. As with Laubach Literacy International’s one-with-one approach, education became “individualized” and “neutral [or positive] skills were taught based on scientific assessment,” with a focus on “correctness” (25). This abstracted but pragmatic approach is convenient for large funding organizations, often removed from the community itself or from populations served, which do not or cannot take local contexts into account. Grabill notes that these technocratic understandings of literacy indicate a “powerful concern on functionality, skills, and work,” accompanied by “a concrete and clear ‘good’ associated with literacy” (26). In order to compete for funds with other organizations, LLC must underscore this “good” associated with literacy and the socioeconomic benefits of the skills students will learn and apply to a job, in which they will benefit society. To return to the example of the WealthSpring fund: for a chance to access these funds, LLC must prove a strong correlation between literacy education programs, workplace readiness and economic self-sufficiency. If in most entrepreneurial models the customer is always right, in the nonprofit model, the funder is always right. It is not profitable to think of learners as “customers,” since they directly contribute little to the economic viability of the organization.

Chapter 5: Whose Community?

Market-driven reality is somewhat obscured by a rhetorical focus on “community” as an appeal to *pathos* – in grant applications and textual representations of

LLC's work, such as the mission statement, newsletters, and other public relations materials. This is necessary for appealing to the work of agencies such as the Nebraska Community Foundation or Lincoln Community Foundation. For instance, NCF's website declares their commitment to "investing in our communities."^{xxiv} They partner with "community leaders." One page is devoted to "Community Stories." Everywhere there are phrases such as "collaboration across the community." I do not doubt the authenticity of their dedication, but the construction and appropriation of this idea of "community" is simplistic. Grabill, too, finds a crucial gap in work concerning community literacies that "leaves undefined and unproblematic the meaning of community" (89). Drawing on the work of Amitai Etzioni, he suggests that "community" is not a singular, homogenous reality; rather, "people are at one and the same time members of several communities," which Etzioni conceives of as "nested" (89). Too often the rhetorical appropriation of "community" refers to a geographic location that can be delimited, functioning as a term of convenience and sentimentality, without acknowledging the number of communities existing within that space and the relationships of these communities to one another.

Also important to consider first is the relationship between institutions and community. Institutions appropriate a somewhat abstract conception of community, but communities do not appropriate institutions. Grabill believes that the tension between institution and community can be productive. He disagrees somewhat with paradigms that sharply bifurcate institutions and communities (i.e. institutions are monolithic while communities are democratic and mutable), noting how in spite of the inherent

differences, they both are *constructed* (92). This is key to examining the idea of community in terms of LLC, granting organizations, and the city of Lincoln.

For example, in the LLC annual report for 2008, community is constructed for an audience of potential donors and tutors, people who can bring resources to the institution. “Community” peppers the document throughout. The introductory letter from the president (*pro tempore* – he currently remains a member of the board) twice mentions community, referring to “our role as a vital part of the Lincoln community.” On the opposite page, it declares the organization’s mission to “strengthen the community.” Both construct LLC as an integral part of this community; the community needs the organization. Furthermore, tutors are described as “community members” that are trained to be literacy volunteers. Of course, everyone is a community member. In this construction, a community member is likely to be a literate, English-speaking person, like the reader of this report. However, this seems to imply that learners at LLC are not (yet) community members in the same sense as these individuals. Indeed, in most cases, LLC’s learners may represent populations that have limited access to forms of civic participation and may be somewhat socially isolated, particularly those who are very new to the country or the area. But that hardly means that they are not members of the community. “Community” seems constructed or appropriated to imply equality and inclusion or a move towards it in much of LLC’s rhetoric (“uniting the community through communication”) but sometimes it is not clear whether all individuals are “community members.” This is where the “the” in front of “community” begins to break down in its usefulness, if members of *the* community are in fact only literate residents of the city.

A section detailing programs describe partnerships that have been developed to “address a major challenge facing our community: the integration of thousands of non-English-speaking refugees and immigrants” (4). Who is this “our”? Is this a challenge for the community, or for the immigrants and refugees? In this construction, the institution is endowed with agency: LLC’s classes “meet the challenge.” Learners, on the other hand, are a “challenge” “facing” the community, who need to be “integrated.” This final term is problematic in the construction of community here, as well, because it implies again that learners are not (really) members of the community until an institution can help them enter it. Grabill draws on Kretzmann and McKnight’s work, which argues that “an approach that focuses exclusively on needs” – the “traditional path to community development” – is really using a “deficit model” (95). Discussing “problems” and needs here is a rhetorical move: readers will be familiar with this “traditional path.” In the long run, however, this is not sustainable. They claim that

“non-profit human service systems, often supported by university research and foundation funding, translate [programs] into local activities that teach people the nature and extent of their problems, and the value of services as the answer to their problems. [...] As a result, they begin to see themselves as people with special needs that can only be met by outsiders. They become consumers of services [...]” (95).

It is true that the annual report does not tell immigrants and refugees that they *have* problems; they are not the audience here. But the construction of them is problematic regardless. In this model, Grabill notes, “people cannot construct communities or design institutions because as ‘clients’ they are given no agency” (96). This construction of people who are by implication part of “the” community – as in the city we all live in – are not part of the abstract community that is rhetorically constructed in these documents.

The final page of the report reiterates this same construction: “the challenge faced by our community is profound, but so is the opportunity for immigrants and refugees to contribute to the community if they learn English.” These already marginalized populations; now they are relegated to a liminal space in which it is not clear if they are members of “our” community, unless or until they learn English.

Chapter 6: “They Think Everyone the Same”: Social Dimensions of Literacy at Work and School

Admittedly, since it is problematic to speak of literacy in terms of individual deficits, at least a nod to the idea of “community” suggests the social, economic, and political forces that are at work in providing access to language and literacy learning. But I am wary of this construction that posits students as “contributors” and does not take into account their own goals and humanity, but seems to position them as resources. It seems to imply that they are contributing little or nothing until they “learn English.” Granted, a number of students I have worked with expressed some level of alienation from “the community” or “American people.” These are the words used by Thanh, a student I currently work one-with-one. He explains, “the refugee, they don’t want go out. They stay home.” I asked why. “At home is family and neighbor, Vietnamese TV. Outside, not easy to talk to them. In Vietnam, you don’t like the guy, he know. He don’t like you, you know. In America, everyone say ‘Hi, how are you?’ But they don’t really want to talk.” Thanh has lived in the US for over 20 years and in Lincoln for over 15 years. He loves to talk; his spoken English comes forth swiftly and evenly. But this has not been adequate to make him feel comfortable in a community of English-speaking Americans,

even at the place he has worked for almost 15 years. From him I have gotten much insight into the feelings of alienation that students feel, and the ways they are quite actively being alienated. His words imply the reality of the “community” – that there may not be much willingness to let immigrants and refugees fully participate in civic and social life. Rhetorically, the impetus is usually on immigrants and refugees to “just learn English,” as I have read in countless frustrating editorial letters. This allows members of the community (of middle class native English speakers) to make perhaps a financial contribution to the cause while abdicating true social responsibility, leaving the rest up to the student.

This seems to be the case for Thanh’s experiences at work, a large industrial firm based in Lincoln that also happens to pay for his tutoring. Occasionally, he relates a story that involves a conversation with a coworker, but these are rare. “Do you talk to your coworkers much?” I asked. He shook his head and replied, “Sometimes say ‘Hi how are you?’ They just say ‘Hi how are you?’ No conversation.” It is not clear, then, that language and literacy skills automatically allow entrance into a community, especially without knowledge of insider values and practices. Warriner cites Lave and Wenger in her examination of refugee women’s participation in communities of practice: “issues about language...may well have more to do with legitimacy of participation and with access to peripherality than they do with knowledge transmission [...] (105). For adult immigrants who are learning English as a second language, the relationship between membership and access to legitimate peripheral participation is dynamic and complicated” (34). Access to a group does not necessitate membership, and what masquerades as membership may not lead to equal levels of access within the group. The

(majority) group in power decides who is legitimate and what kind of participation is legitimized. Even if Thanh has knowledge of their shared values and practices, that still offers no guarantee that he will not simply be “Other-ed” by a native speaker.

This puts the tutor in a frustrating position: as a white, middle-class female, I lack access to much of the knowledge and values that are shared by the majority group at his workplace: male blue-collar workers. I am part of the ethereal constructed “community” of the annual report but not the community that Thanh needs access to. Thanh explains how the management does not fully account for diversity among the workers: “They think everybody the same. They think everyone at least high school in this country. But not all the same.” I realized that this company pays me to tutor their employee in English, presumably so he can communicate more effectively at work. But they have access to the literacies that offer membership and access in their community of practice, while I do not. With the gesture of funding his classes, they appear to have adequately addressed Thanh’s needs and literacy is now a matter of neutral knowledge transmission (from me to him).

Or perhaps, one might argue, Thanh simply is not trying to communicate or participate in the community. Maybe he’s not friendly enough or maybe he’s too friendly. Maybe it’s just his personality. However, Norton argues that “while many have assumed that learners can be defined unproblematically as motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited, without considering that such affective factors are frequent socially constructed in inequitable relations of power” (24). Thanh is fully aware of these inequitable relations of power; however, others are not comfortable addressing the reality because they (we?) may be implicated in that structure.

I still struggle to move past this discomfort with the awareness of my own power to label, categorize, and name students in ways that will impact our experiences. Grabill notes, drawing from Giroux (1989) that literacy has an ethical component that structures relationships between learners and teachers: “[t]he relationship between ‘ourselves’ and ‘others’ marks a border, a relation of power, which can be constructed oppressively or not” (52). For example, when I first started to teach English at LLC, I worked with a group of Sudanese women. I remember feeling quite frustrated at how much they would “chat” with one another and at the frequent silence when I asked a question. So I expressed my concerns to an experienced coworker who had worked with some of the same women. “They just want to talk to each other! It’s like they’re not even *trying* to speak English,” I whined. She smiled and told me slowly about how some of them would be beaten when they gave the wrong answer in school. Women in particular, she explained, had very limited schooling opportunities and literacy skills and therefore a shared oral culture among them was extremely important. As mostly Muslim women, they might be reluctant to even attend classes if it were not for the community of women and their conversation. Since most of them do not work, most time is spent at home taking care of children and the home. They do not go downtown on Saturday night for a pitcher of beer with the girls. This may seem obvious, of course, but I must admit it was not apparent until I talked to my coworker. Rather, I had hastily applied labels and excuses to the students, rather than meaningfully accounting for their situation (and my responsibility to address it).

It became clear to me that learning has an important social dynamic and I had neglected to see these women as not simply students or individuals, but part of other

groups that constitute and maintain their identity and accepted school and social practices. These identities rub up against the new identities they are supposed to embody in ways that I as a tutor did not account for initially. I have internalized the practices characteristic of American public schools to the extent that they seemed natural and not debatable (“Be quiet. Listen. Take notes. Raise your hand. Don’t be late.”). However, I had neglected to make my expectations articulate or transparent. Thankfully, the tutors I talked to were more aware of the importance of the social dimension. Longtime tutor Lisa explains about her experience tutoring: “There’s a reason that we don’t have private tutors in public schools. [Students] being new to this country, they need the interaction, and they develop and maintain friendships.” This support system is arguably just as important as –and also important to – developing language skills. Language learning also requires context for meaning. AmeriCorps member Karen emphasized this when I asked her what literacy means in the context of LLC, who contrasts her experience teaching a group to working with an individual: “I think that in certain settings there is a social aspect for literacy where they need a social setting. One to one, [my student] did not have interaction” with other students, but “she had a TV.” Lisa and Karen’s words point to Warriner’s observation that “[i]dentities, practices, communities and competence are all situated within dynamic contexts” (29). Television, unfortunately, does not provide a dynamic social setting, but it is easier for students to access than a genuine social situation in which they can use English in ways that draws upon, enrich, or maintain their social identity/ies. Accounting for the social dimensions of literacy requires accounting for cultural identity, along with allowing social activity that serves a learning function.

So how do we do this? How can we meaningfully account for the amount of cultural diversity represented by LLC students? Mary Pipher writes that in her experiences with refugees, it “is impossible to separate what is cultural from what is personal” (70); this may seem especially true in a one-with-one setting. Therefore the task is not to delineate student characteristics in terms of cultural versus personal, but for tutors to recognize the cultural dimensions of their own personal experiences and socialization. When we distance ourselves from our assumptions and experience that we have normalized, we are more prepared to understand a student’s needs and point of view. Tutor Lisa explains the best way to do this, when I asked her what the most important thing was to convey to new tutors during training:

“Shut up and listen. Some tutors say, ‘but they don’t speak English!’ Well, when you ask [a student] a question, wait for them to answer. They can say a lot more than what they want you to know. Sometimes they just frown and look at me, but I sit there and they tell me eventually. Be patient. “

She then told me about a student who was matched with her and who knew no English at all. After stumbling through attempted introductions, Lisa just sat silently for a short while. Eventually, the woman looked at her and said - almost asked - “push.” She repeated the word a few times. Lisa, a retired nurse, then realized, “This woman has just had a baby” and was repeating the word she heard throughout her delivery. So they practiced the motion of “push,” and then Lisa taught her “pull,” and so on. Just this one word told Leona quite a lot: that this woman was a mother who had recently experienced giving birth in an American hospital (and that they had this experience in common). Lisa knows that every student has a story, and she listens for the bits of each story. The

personal is intertwined with the cultural, and listening for both these dimensions at work can enrich tutor perspectives. Of course, this takes patience and practice.

Moments like this show what literacy means for students at LLC, or, rather, that it means any number of different things depending on the socio-cultural contexts of the moment, place, and people involved. Student literacies have a complex, dynamic relationship with the more widely prevailing conceptions of literacy that are constructed or perpetuated by institutions. It is easy to forget the average middle-class American's conceptions of literacy have always been impacted by socialization within institutional confines, as well, in public schooling or higher education, for example. Any trajectory of literacy is also influenced by personal relationships and social contexts, such as individual "sponsors" of literacy and the socio-cultural dimensions of home communities. An awareness of this dialectic is essential for those tutoring adult ELLs. Reflecting on one's own literacy experiences may not offer direct insight into a student's needs, but it helps us conceive of literacy in terms of its broader dimensions and implications.

Conclusion: Moving Forward – "Who are we going to call *us*?"

It seems much too soon for a conclusion. This points to my first, and most obvious, conclusion: that community-based literacy programs are important research sites where more study needs to take place. I do not mean only those with credentials from an institution of higher learning – though they are certainly an essential part of it. Still, my research began with simply reflecting on my work and articulating it to others. A program that offers the bulk of training before tutoring begins may not allow enough opportunity for tutors to reflect upon their experiences, (re)evaluate their practices, and

voice concerns or ideas. Gaps will continue to exist between student and institutional conceptions of literacy without mobilization of the volunteer tutors that mediate these ideas. My experience has led me to believe that most tutors are (or become) keenly aware of student needs and desires; they see the intersections of the personal, cultural, and social dimensions of literacy. Those reviewing grant applications from a computer in their office, however, usually lack this perspective.^{xxv} Certainly, they cannot be everywhere at once. Someone must meet them in the proverbial middle, but this middle space indeed exists only conceptually as of now. Limited opportunities exist for tutors to engage in ongoing professional development and dialogues with those who make decisions and policy. LLC serves a relatively marginalized population of students, but volunteer literacy tutors are also marginalized in a sense. So here I turn to Lisa's recommendations:

People will take the amount of responsibility you give them. Maybe I am naïve. [Staff] say, 'Oh, the other tutors aren't like you, you can't expect them to do this and this.' But I think you can expect more of them. [...] Why do tutors drop out? Follow-up with them, reward them. Not that I don't feel rewarded. I get thank yous and I feel very rewarded.

I should add that recently LLC staff has worked very hard at increasing efforts to follow up with tutors; reaching each tutor can certainly be a challenge for part-time staff with limited hours. This is one positive step toward truly listening to tutors, just as they must learn to listen to students. Incorporating student voices in decision making can be challenging with adult ELLs. It is not impossible, of course, but besides communication barriers, students may be ambivalent about what to do with this kind of authority, which they may or may not be comfortable with (as Pat Campbell argues about the "bottom-up" approach). However, perhaps tutors can help bridge the gap. For instance, there is a

(volunteer) board of directors, but what about a board of volunteer tutors, representing their own interests and perspectives, and also advocating for students? Power and responsibility should be more evenly distributed, thereby making it more visible and less opaque. Tutors might receive well-deserved recognition in the form of an award or piece in a newsletter publication, but this does not sustain dialogue.

Perhaps recognition is not the right word; recognition is a rhetorical gesture, implying one-directional action. The organization that recognizes tutors in this way should also meaningfully listen to them and incorporate their voices into the mission and work of the organization. I see this as a microcosmic representation of an ideal: an environment in which funding entities will truly listen to the organizations they award funds to, instead of employing a top-down approach that holds community-based organizations strictly accountable for results that serve the funders' goals without adequately accounting for the local context of the organization.^{xxvi}

In addition, literacy organizations and grant funders should consider the ethical dimension of literacy in relationships, which Giroux (1989) and Grabill emphasize, since this also applies to institutional relationships that affect literacy programming. Relationships can be structured in ways that distribute power democratically or oppressively (or somewhere in between). Grabill also draws on Freire to emphasize the fact that an ethical position entailing a true commitment to student needs requires "solidarity, the articulation of a 'we,' the construction of a community" (52). This begins on a more local level, by moving past the simple "us" and "them." Certainly it is not easy to move beyond our tendency toward such binaries, but it is necessary if we want to make genuine reference to the community. Unfortunately, I don't know exactly how to

articulate this “we” yet. It is easy to fall back into familiar dichotomies of “us” and “them” when I think of my experiences.

In attempting to work through this conundrum, I thought of Nancy Grimm’s work relating to another space that relies on one-with-one learning and teaching, the college writing center. Grimm states: “The ability of writing centers to explain their understandings is limited by the language of power, the discursive hegemony. Because world views are linguistically defined, the terms for naming a different reality are not readily available” (“Rearticulating,” 20). At time this seems to be the case for Lincoln Literacy Council as it navigates hegemonic discourses about literacy, ones that are rooted in the paradigm of the literate and the illiterate, the “us” and “them.” No matter how benevolent any individual or institution’s intentions are, the language available for articulating reality – either actual or desired – often seems lacking. Thus the status quo remains intact. Nevertheless, Grimm reminds of us Antonio Gramsci’s claim that “hegemony exists because of consent” (20). As Grimm calls for a rearticulation of the writing center, perhaps it has come time to rearticulate certain aspects of ELL instruction in volunteer-based community literacy organizations.

The first step is locally rearticulating the shared idea “community” in a way that allows for solidarity, requiring sustained conversations among diverse groups. Grimm also offers a simple way to begin the process of change: telling stories to one another. She writes that, “[n]ot sharing protects us from anxiety [about our literacy work] but it also maintains hegemony” (20). Just as important as conversation is the willingness to listen to ourselves, maintaining an awareness of the ethical component in how our narratives and naming practices structure our roles and experiences. An awareness of

how students name themselves, their community and their learning is also necessary in order to begin working toward shared understandings and goals.

When I asked tutors Cynthia and Karen how their students name or describe their learning experiences, they told me about their Sudanese women's class. They explained that these students say "Good English" if they like an expression or something about the language suddenly makes sense. For instance, a couple students expressed confusion when, after heavy snowfall, people with vehicles stuck in the drifts attempted to ask these students to "do them a favor." These students thought they had said "fever" and were confused about why strangers were talking to them about illness. When they learned in class about how to "ask a favor" and "do a favor," they realized their mistake, laughed, and repeated "Good English, good English!" with delight. I wonder to what extent the "we's" conception of "Good English" is aligned with this one, in which English is only *good* when it becomes meaningful for the learner in the context of his or her own experience and understanding.

This is the heart of the challenge facing LLC – how to be mindful of what is meaningful for students. If this were the conclusion of a more typical – and perhaps more practical – work on adult literacy or ELL instruction, now I would offer suggestions to *tutors* on what they can *do* to be more effective tutors. However, that is not my goal, and it shifts the responsibility for successful literacy education onto individual volunteers rather than the powerful institutions that control the discourses about and funding for literacy. It is the institutions and accompanying power structures and discourses that must change to better account for the local community contexts of literacy education. Nevertheless, since this change must begin on a micro level, tutors, all literacy

practitioners, and the members of a community might keep in mind Pat Campbell's mandate to consider not only what to *do*, but how things will *be*. Furthermore, they can be mindful of how what *is* or what *will be* is named and described. To achieve true change, this must extend beyond the sanctioned learning space. In a recent "Nebraska Stories" documentary, "The Middle of Everywhere," on NET, Mary Pipher asked her audience to consider a relationship of solidarity with the refugees and immigrants of Lincoln, what she describes as a *cultural broker* in her book of the same name. Instead of the usual question, "What are *we* going to do about *them*?" that hovers over many a policy discussion, she asks viewers to consider something far more important: "*Who are we going to call 'us'?*"

Notes

ⁱ LLC annual report, 2009.

ⁱⁱ Mathews-Aydinli (2008).

ⁱⁱⁱ lancaster.unl.edu/community/articles/lincolnrefugees.shtml

^{iv} Refugees and immigrants imply different populations, from different countries. Refugees can only come to the United States if they provide evidence of persecution or have good reason to fear of persecution. They have no choice of location when they apply for admission into the United States. Immigrants more often come voluntarily and usually (but not always) under less desperate circumstances. However, complex international political forces are at work in deciding who qualifies as a refugee.

^v See, i.e., *A Community-Based Approach to Literacy Programs*, ed. Peggy Sissel; Grabill (2001)

^{vi} See “Yes, but...” in *Participatory Practices in Adult Education* (ed. Campbell and Burnaby, 2001) and *From the Community to the Community: A Guidebook for Training Community Literacy Instructors* (1994).

^{vii} In total, I have worked with Thanh for almost a year and half. He gave permission for me to also discuss our experiences prior to the official start date of research, when appropriate.

^{viii} See Chapelle and Duff (2003)

^{ix} See Bernat (2004); Hubenthal (2004); Warhol (2004); Skilton-Sylvester (2000)

^x See Gordon (2004); Menard-Warwick (2005);

^{xi} Mathews-Aydinli agrees with criticisms of such work offered by Johnson (2001), who is cited earlier in this piece.

^{xii} See Schlusberg and Mueller (1995)

^{xiii} The very first thing I was asked to do when I began my AmeriCorps service at LLC was to help contact tutors to complete a short survey. With several staff spending hours engaged in this daily, less than a majority of tutors were actually contacted, and even fewer completed surveys. But Wu and Carter report a 68% response rate.

^{xiv} i.e., Graff (1988); Flower (1994)

^{xv} These programs in Canada are affiliated with ProLiteracy Intl., the same parent group as LLC belongs to.

^{xvi} See, i.e., Youngman 1986

^{xvii} ProLiteracy: <http://proliteracy.com/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=590&srcid=269>

^{xviii} ProLiteracy: <http://proliteracy.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=303&srcid=191>

^{xix} In the context of LLC, I will refer to “literacy” as also encompassing other language and communication skills. This is not to imply that reading and writing should not be studied on their own; however, in the context of adult ELLs, it is much more difficult to distinguish between these sub-skills and overall communication skills that are taught under the institutional banner of “literacy.” “Literacy” in the Western sense is not the same as the conception of literacy in many other cultures, where oral traditions may be equally valued as written ones.

^{xx} Figures are from 2008, according to the 2009 annual report.

^{xxi} Thanks to LLC business manager Senida for providing additional information about funding sources.

^{xxii} Figures are from 2008, according to the 2009 annual report.

^{xxiii} There are two student slots on the board, but one has been vacant since the board member stepped down to work for LLC as a childcare provider instead.

^{xxiv} <http://www.nebcommfound.org/HTC.htm>

Generally speaking; I am a “peer reviewer” for grants submitted to the National Center for Volunteer Service. We listen to recorded messages; we exchange emails and read files posted online. We do not connect with the community.

^{xxvi} Some organizations, like United Way, do attempt to create relationships in the communities that they serve, employing approaches such as “asset-based development” that take into account existing resources, not existing problems or deficits (Grabill 95). However, it would appear that the current economic climate has also squeezed United Way’s resources. They once provided 3% of LLC’s operating costs, but for the current year were forced to limit local programming to that serving children and families. This means that LLC’s only way in is through an appeal to family literacy, which is already disproportionately funded in relation to the community of learners at LLC.

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